

h. p. lovecraft

SOME NOTES ON

**by
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\$1.25

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—being an examination of certain myths, together with an explanation about unfinished manuscripts left by Lovecraft and some comments on the writing habits, as well as the Barlow journal of Lovecraft's visit to Florida in 1934, and four letters by Lovecraft

by August Derleth

ARKHAM HOUSE: Publishers

1959

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The Myths

Howard Phillips Lovecraft had not yet been dead a year when myths about him began to grow. Perhaps it was a tribute to this extraordinary personality, so reclusive that Vincent Starrett was early moved to declare Lovecraft "his own most fantastic creation," that such a body of myth should so quickly take form. Certainly it was quick testimony of Lovecraft's place—a minor one, to be sure, but a secure one—in the roster of notable Americans in literature, that he should so soon become an almost legendary figure to many thousands of people who knew him only through his published work. Moreover, the myths about Lovecraft have spread to all associated with him and his work.

Unhappily, like most such myths, they do him and his friends injustice either on the right or the left. Myths have a tendency to continue their growth, and the human mind is peculiarly given to belief in romantic fantasies rather than adherence to more prosaic truth—though little in Lovecraft's creative existence could be described as prosaic. An examination of some of the Lovecraft myth is *a propos*, lest the myth-pattern become accepted as fact.

1) *That Lovecraft died of starvation.*

Lovecraft, by his own account in his extensive letters, had been a quasi-invalid for the better part of his life. Ill health had been chronic in his early years, interfering actively with his schooling. He suffered from an allergy to cold and all its complications, and he died eventually—on March 15, 1937—at the Jane Brown Memorial Hospital in Providence of a combination of cancer of the intestine and Bright's disease. That Lovecraft spent days and perhaps weeks at a time in a state of undernourishment is probably true; it might be said that his condition was occasionally aggravated by the irregularity of his eating habits; but that he died of starvation is untrue, and it would also be going too far to suggest that Lovecraft lived in a state of chronic undernourishment, as some writers have suggested he did.

The Lovecraft letters are filled with advice about living

inexpensively. Consider these paragraphs, for example, which are typical, written under date of January 16, 1931: "I think you ought to learn to live on less money—for a writer is never likely to be very well fixed, and the sooner he gets his regimen scaled down to actualities, the more comfortable he is. It can be done—for I've done it myself. Up to 1910 or 1915 there was no one more recklessly careless of expenditures than I—even though the big collapse in family fortunes had come as far back as 1904. My mother used to say that I was absolutely ruined as a handler of money, and utterly spoiled as an endurer of poverty. However—as things grew still worse, the old man did manage to scale down everything; learning little by little what might best be eliminated without interfering with atmospheric continuity and freedom of imaginative life.

"Today I get along with a maximum expense of \$15.00 per week, not counting the reckless antiquarian trips to which I irresponsibly blow myself about once a year. And this is not any squalid getting-along, either—indeed, I'd feel damn' lucky if I could always be sure of the hebdomadal fifteen which makes the present standard possible. It is a matter of caution and deliberation in the selection and preservation of things, and in the judicious quest for lodgings at once cheap and in a reasonably select neighborhood. In the course of years, by a system of trial and error, one learns what nourishing

and palatable food is cheapest, and what system of clothes-choosing is likely to make replacements as far apart as possible. One learns, too, how to make public libraries serve instead of indiscriminate book-buying. \$15.00 per week will float any man of sense in a very tolerable way—lodging him in a cultivated neighborhood if he knows how to look for rooms—keeping him dressed in soberly conservative neatness if he knows how to choose quiet designs and durable fabrics among cheap suits, and feeding him amply and palatably if he is not an epicurean crank, and if he does not attempt to depend upon restaurants. One must have a kitchen-alcove and obtain provisions at grocery and delicatessen prices rather than pay cafes and cafeterias the additional price they demand for more service. Of course, this applies only to the single man. My one venture into matrimony ended in the divorce court for reasons 98% financial. But if one expects to be a man of letters one has to sacrifice something—and for anybody of reasonably ascetic temperament the interests and freedoms of imaginative and creative life more than overbalance the advantages of domesticity.

“\$8.00 to \$10.00 a week will get a very good-sized room in the best of neighbourhoods in the smaller cities, and \$3.00 per week sees me fully fed. My dinners cost about 25¢ each, (a typical one—1/4 lb. veal loaf at delicatessen, 11¢; 1/2 lb. potato salad, 8¢; cake for dessert,

2½¢; coffee—using condensed milk—averaging 2½¢) and my breakfast-lunches perhaps 10¢—a couple of doughnuts, cheese, and coffee. This is all I would eat even if wealthy, and it is just as palatable as the average programme. I also use Campbell's soups, 10¢ per can, and other inexpensive accessories . . .”

To this legend of Lovecraft's starvation, the ex-Mrs. Lovecraft gave some support, for she was appalled at his eating habits and strove to alter them, with, briefly, some success. He did attain some girth, and was for a time almost fat during his marriage; but the increase in his weight began in 1922, during which year his letters refer almost with embarrassment to his need for having his clothes altered, and not in 1924, the year of his marriage. Lovecraft lived with his wife less than two years, and his gained weight did not outlast his marriage. He was normally thin, rather than heavy, though Mrs. Annie E. Phillips Gamwell, the aunt who survived him until 1941, was a plump woman, shorter in stature than he. Lovecraft's eating habits were often dictated by necessity—he refers above to feeling lucky if he could always be sure of the minimum income he though necessary for survival—but just as often they were his by choice—“This is all I would eat even if wealthy . . .”

2) *That Lovecraft committed suicide.*

This legend was actually propagated by people who

belong to that curious group of mentally unbalanced souls who are always somehow mysteriously "in the know" of facts or so-called facts no one else can ascertain. Fortunately, the records of the Jane Brown Memorial Hospital contain all the necessary details substantiating the facts of Lovecraft's death. Further, Lovecraft set down in his own spidery script, as well as he was able to do so, clinical details about the experiences of his terminal illness. One can only wonder at the nightmarish temerity of deranged minds capable of conceiving such a myth as this.

3) *That Lovecraft was violently anti-Semitic.*

There is a rationale for this particular myth, and a case can be made for it if one wishes to take lines out of context from the Lovecraft letters. It would be no less untrue, however. The fact is that the legend of Lovecraft's anti-Semitism grew out of Lovecraft's early dislike of anyone who failed to appreciate the old culture of New England and old things in general. It so happened that many of his favorites antiquarian haunts in Providence and the vicinity were despoiled by foreigners who moved into the old houses; these foreigners were of various nationalities and races, and Lovecraft disliked them all impartially.

His dislike, however, did not represent racial prejudice, but was rather a strong symptom of that fear of

and dislike for *change*, which represents to all of us the passing of the familiar, and is in fact symptomatic, more deeply, of a basic insecurity which is associated with the passing of familiar aspects of life which have come to signify security for those of us who are prone to such reactions. It is only natural, in the face of the facts about his sheltered early life, that Lovecraft's sense of security would be bound up with all the aspects of that life, with old things—houses, people, books, past time—just as it was.

His early letters thus reflect his antipathy to things alien to the culture he loved and to which he fancied he belonged—and in a very real sense he did belong to it—and the careless reader might judge that Lovecraft was actually anti-Semitic, anti-Oriental, anti-Negro. Real racial prejudice is a symptom of something far more grave than a sense of insecurity associated with place and time; it is rather a symptom of a basic conviction of inferiority coupled with active fear. Lovecraft was a modest man, but he suffered no inferiority complex, and he feared no one. His later letters, fortunately—together with his marriage to a Jewess—prove that the charge is unfounded; for his expanding horizons enabled him to overcome his violent dislike of the changers. He continued to regret change; he expressed his regret in poem and story (as in *Brick Row*, for instance); but the violent antipathies were no more. Had he been truly racially prej-

udiced, this change would never have taken place.

4) *That many of Lovecraft's manuscripts were lost.*

This may have grown from the fact that the mss. of *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* were misplaced for a time. The former was a finished manuscript, but the latter was only in first draft, and, had he lived, Lovecraft intended to rewrite it. Lovecraft frequently destroyed early drafts of stories, and occasionally there are hints in his letters of many stories destroyed because they proved unsatisfactory to him, but it is exceedingly doubtful that he destroyed any but early versions of tales which he later rewrote. Evidence suggests that Lovecraft made careful note of all plots which came to him or which he worked out, and the fragments of plots or stories which survived him support the belief that if any manuscripts were destroyed, they were only earlier versions of stories which survived. Nor could these have been many in number, for it was not often that Lovecraft's stories went through preliminary versions, but only in his later years, when he grew increasingly dissatisfied with his work. Certainly no Lovecraft manuscript was lost, for R. H. Barlow soon took possession of all the writings and gave a careful account of them, within a fortnight after Lovecraft's untimely death.

The Unfinished Manuscripts

The frequent reference to "unfinished manuscripts" in such books as *The Survivor and Others* and *The Shuttered Room and Other Pieces* have given many readers the idea that Lovecraft left many "unfinished" stories. This is, however, not the case. Quite the contrary. Lovecraft left no unfinished manuscripts whatsoever, in the sense of a story begun and left unfinished. He did leave certain fragments, he left fragmentary ideas, he left notes about which his intentions seemed clear, and he left many notes about which his intentions were unclear.

Of the stories which have grown from these fragments and notes—*The Lurker at the Threshold*, *The*

Survivor, *The Gable Window*, *Wentworth's Day*, *The Peabody Heritage*, *The Ancestor*, *The Shadow out of Space*, *The Lamp of Albazred*, *The Shuttered Room*, *The Fisherman of Falcon Point*—only three contain very much Lovecraft prose. *The Lamp of Albazred* perhaps contains the most, proportionately, having been put together very much from Lovecraft's letters. *The Survivor* was drawn wholly from notes, disconnected sentences, and a fairly complete outline. *The Lurker at the Threshold* was built from a pair of fragments. The rest of the stories grew out of jottings left by Lovecraft, insufficient in most cases to give any sure form to plot.

Publication of *The Lurker at the Threshold* stimulated a certain amount of speculation as to how much of that collaboration was written by Lovecraft and how much by Derleth. One brash reviewer of the book climbed out on a limb when he wrote with arrogant assurance: "The first 18,000 words . . . were written by Lovecraft before his death, and the remainder (some 45,000 words) have been added by Derleth following Lovecraft's notes. . . . The Lovecraft section, which ends at the bottom of page 58, is written in the quiet, restrained style of *Charles Dexter Ward*, and . . . may have been done first, only to be abandoned midway in favor of the other novel. At any rate, this was the most felicitous period of Lovecraft's style." Of Derleth's "portion," the reviewer went on to write fatuously: "Whatever his intentions, his style

differs markedly from Lovecraft's, which is shown by the exactitude with which, to the satisfaction of this reviewer, the point of transition can be determined—the bottom of page 58.”

The facts of the matter are quite otherwise. Under the title of *The Round Tower*, Lovecraft left a portion of writing describing a tower which some Providence friends and readers believe was suggested by the famed Newport tower, whose *raison d'être* has not yet been revealed. In another paragraph or two, not connected to the previous fragment, Lovecraft described the “rose window” mentioned in the novel. These Lovecraft portions were included in *The Lurker at the Threshold* in two places. *The Round Tower* portion begins with the last paragraph on page 19, and ends with the second-last line on page 21. A random fragment is reproduced in the quotation on page 23. The descriptive notes for the “rose window” were not in such form as to permit use as written; they were incorporated into the narrative between pages 55 and 57.

The total wordage thus written by the late H. P. Lovecraft was thus in the vicinity of 1200. The possibility exists that the two sets of fragments were for different stories; yet they appealed to me as manifestly related and as possible to connect, and out of them I constructed and wrote *The Lurker at the Threshold*, which had nowhere been laid out, planned, or plotted

by Lovecraft, but was evoked from his fragments and notes.

Here then is the fragment titled *The Round Tower*, as Lovecraft wrote it, and as it appears in *The Lurker at the Threshold*:

"But, not to speak at too great Length upon so Horrid a matter, I will add onlie what is commonly reported concerning an Happening in New Dunnich, fifty years since, when Mr. *Bradford* was Governor. 'Tis said, one Richard *Billington*, being instructed partly by Evill Books, and partly by an antient Wonder-Worker amongst ye *Indian* Savages, so fell away from good *Christian* Practice that he not onlie lay'd claim to Immortality in ye flesh, but sett up in ye woods a great Ring of Stones, inside of which he say'd Prayers to ye Divell, Place of Dagon, Namely, and sung certain Rites of Magick abominable by Scripture. This being brought to ye Notice of ye Magistrates, he deny'd all Blasphemous Dealings; but not long after he privately shew'd great Fear about some Thing he had call'd out of ye Sky at Night. There were in that year seven slayings in ye woods near to *Richard Billington's* Stones, those slain being crushed and half-melted in a fashion outside all experience. Upon Talk of a Tryall, *Billington* dropt out of Sight, nor was any clear Word of him ever after heard. Two months from then, by Night, there was heard a Band of *Wampanaug* Savages howling and singing in ye Woods; and

it appeared they took down ye Ring of Stones and did much besides. For their head Man *Misquamacus*, that same antient Wonder-Worker of whom *Billington* had learnt some of his Sorceries, came shortly into ye town and told Mr. *Bradford* some strange Things: Namely, that *Billington* had done worse Evill than cou'd be well repair'd, and that he was no doubt eat up by what he had call'd out of ye Sky. That there was no Way to send back that Thing he had summon'd, so ye *Wampanaug* Wise Man had caught and prison'd it where the Ring of Stones had been.

"They had digg'd down three Ells deep and two across, and had Thither charmed ye Daemon with Spells that they knew; covering it over with" (here followed an illegible line) "carved with what they call'd ye *Elder* Sign. On this they" (again a few indistinct words) "digg'd from ye Pit. The old Savage affirm'd this place was on no Account to be disturb'd, lest ye Daemon come loose again which it wou'd if ye flatt Stone with ye *Elder* Sign shou'd get out of Place. On being ask'd what ye Daemon look'd like, *Misquamacus* covered his Face so that onlie ye Eyes look'd out, and then gave a very curious and Circumstantial Relation, saying it was sometimes small and solid, like a great Toad ye Bigness of many Ground-Hogs, but sometimes big and cloudy, with no Shape, though with a Face which had Serpents grown from it.

"It had yet Name *Ossadagowah*, which signifi'd" (this was rewritten to "signifys") "ye child of *Sadogowah*, ye which is held to be a Frightfull Spirit spoke of by antients as come down from ye Stars and being formerly worshipt in lands to ye North. Ye *Wampanaug*s and ye *Nansets* and *Nabrigansets* knew how to draw It out of ye Heavens but never did so because of ye exceeding great Evilness of It. They knew also how to catch and prison It, tho' they cou'd not send It back whence It came. It was delcar'd that ye old Tribes of *Lamah*, who dwelt under ye Great Bear and were antiently destroy'd for their Wickedness, knew how to manage It in all Ways. Many upstart Men pretended to a Knowledge of such and divers other Outer Secrets, but none in these Parts cou'd give any Proof of truly having ye aforesaid Knowledge. It was said by some that *Ossadogowah* often went back to ye Sky from choice without any sending, but that he cou'd not come back unless Summon'd.

"This much ye antient Wizard *Misquamacus* told to Mr. *Bradford*, and ever after, a great Mound in ye Woods near ye Pond southwest of New Dunnich hath been straitly lett alone. Ye Tall Stone is these Twenty yrs. gone, but ye Mound is mark'd by ye Circumstance, that nothing, neither grass nor brush, will grow upon it. Grave men doubt that ye evill *Billington* was eat up as ye Savages believe, by what he call'd out of Heaven, notwithstanding certain Reports of ye idle, of his being since seen in divers places."

The Lovecraft portion, as written, went on in this fashion: ". . . and that no longer ago than the late monstrous Witchcrafts in Essex-County, in the year 1692," while the paragraph in *The Lurker at the Threshold* was concluded in this manner: "Ye Wonder-Worker *Misquamacus* told that he mistrusted not but that *Billington* had been taken; he wou'd not say that he had been eaten up by It, as others among ye Savages believ'd, but he affirm'd that *Billington* was no longer on this Earth, whereat God be prais'd."

Lovecraft's notes continued in three brief paragraphs, as follows:

"(If desirable, remove references to *Billington*'s possible survival.)

"But in respect of generall Infamy, no Report more terrible hath come to Notice, than of what Goodwife *Doten*, Relict of *John Doten* of *Duxbury* in the Old Colonie, brought out of the woods near Candlemas of 1683.

". . . borne that which was neither Beast nor Man, but like to a monstrous Bat with humane Face. The which was burnt by Order of the High Sheriff on the fifth of June in the year 1654."

These paragraphs, put together and expanded, occur in the novel on page 23, in this fashion: "But in respect of Generall Infamy, no Report more terrible hath come to Notice, than of what Goodwife *Doten*, Relict of *John Doten* of *Duxbury* in the Old Colonies, brought out of

the Woods near Candlemas of 1787. She affirm'd, and her good neighbours likewise, that it had been borne to her, and took oath that she did not know by what manner it had come upon her, for it was neither Beast nor Man but like to a monstrous Bat with human face. It made no sound but look'd at all and sundry with baleful eyes. There were those who swore that it bore a frightful resemblance to the Face of one long dead, one *Richard Bellingham* or *Bollinhan* who is affirm'd to have vanished utterly after consort with Daemons in the country of New Dunnich. The horrible Beast-Man was examined by the Court of Azzizes and the which then burnt by order of the High-Sherif on the 5th of June in the year 1788."

The only alteration made in the long Lovecraft notes was the substitution of New Dunnich for Lovecraft's *New Plymouth*. The whole purported, in Lovecraft's notes, to be a quotation under the head, "Of Evill Sorceries done in New-England of Daemons in no Humane Shape," from a work titled: "THAUMATURGICALL PRODIGIES in the New-English Canaan; By the Rev. Ward Phillips, Pastor of the Second Church in Arkham, in the Mafse-achusetts-Bay—Boston, 1697." These notes were preceded by the title, *The Round Tower*, and this prefatory paragraph:

"S. of Arkham is cylindrical tower of stone with conical roof—perhaps 12 feet across and 20 feet high. There has been a great arched opening (quarter way up?) but

it is sealed up with masonry. The thing rises from the bottom of a densely wooded ravine once the bed of an extinct tributary to the Miskatonic. Whole region feared and shunned by rustics. Tales of fate of persons climbing into tower before opening was sealed. Indian legends speak of it as existing as long as they could remember—supposed to be older than mankind. Legend that it was built by Old Ones (shapeless and gigantic amphibia) and that it was once under the water. Dressed stone masonry shows odd and unknown technique. Geometrical designs on large stone above sealed opening utterly baffling. Supposed to house a treasure or something which Old Ones value highly. Possibly nothing of interest to human beings. Rumours that it connects with hidden caverns where water still exists. Perhaps Old Ones still alive. Base seems to extend indefinitely downward—ground level having somewhat risen. Has not been seen for ages, since everyone shuns the ravine.”

Secondary notes relative to the mysterious window or “carved surface with convex glass circle seven inches in diameter in centre” related primarily to a story to be set on “Central Hill, Kingsport” in the ancient house of “Edward Orne.” This story remains in essence to be written, since not enough was borrowed from this set of notes to invalidate a second story; and I mean to write it, possibly in novel length, time and circumstances permitting, under the title *The Watchers Out of Time*.

In regard to the Lovecraft notes for *The Survivor*—Lovecraft's own title, it should be observed, the late R. H. Barlow has left this explanation: "This syllabus, pencilled on the blank portions of a newspaper cartoon, hints at plans for a last, never-written story. Lovecraft spoke of it with some fullness one afternoon in 1934, but since I expected to read it in a few months or a year, I retained only casual impressions of the shape it was to have had. Inspired by an actual 17th-century house in the Quebec style which interrupts a staid New England street, the tale would have dealt with a French wizard who sought to duplicate in himself the fabulous longevity of the crocodile, but who succeeded only in changing his form to a hideous extent. I remember there was to have been a scene where some one glimpsed the bent reptilian figure as it hurried across a miasmatic garden behind the strange house, to vanish in the well-mouth which its condition dictated as habitat; but I cannot establish other details."

The complete Lovecraft notes out of which, together with Barlow's memory of his conversation with Lovecraft, *The Survivor* was actually written as a posthumous collaboration, are:

"Jean-Francois Charrière. "

"Surgeon.

"Studies crocodile and gavial.

"B. 1636. Bayonne. Anci Lapurdum.

"Elder secrets hinted.

"Paris 1653. Aet. 17.

"Study'd under Richd. Wiseman, Royalist exile in France. Ante 1660.

"Had been surgeon with Fr. army in India. Pondicherry—Caromandall Coast 1674 & (1683).

"Quebec 1691.

"Arkham 1697.

"House 1698-9.

"Climax 1708.

"1708

1636

72

"Have deteriorative evolution (toward croc.) occur in tomb."

The Writing Habits

Much has been made of Lovecraft's desire to write at night. He preferred to write either by night or in conditions simulating night—by day in an artificially darkened room, for instance. This was doubtless because he found it easier to indulge his fantastic imagination in darkness or semi-darkness, since, after all, he wrote so much about the creatures of outer darkness. There is no doubt but that he indulged this idiosyncrasy frequently.

But not always. He often wrote on the hillsides so beloved to him, as he sat in the late afternoon hours or early twilight looking down upon Providence, though it is true that this was seldom finished writing—letters

most frequently were written there, and notes for stories or short poems. His book-lined study was his inspiration—a room from the walls of which gleamed the backs of well-worn books in the half-light, or the wan lamplight, where he was surrounded by the things of his childhood and youth—those he had managed to save from one house to another—which took on a new lease of life, as it were, in this half-dark in which his imagination functioned best.

He liked to write in comfort, understandably. What author does not? "I do most of my writing around the house in a ragged old grey dressing-gown," he wrote me under date of December 25, 1930; "but this is not because I base any imaginative conception of myself as a robed Eastern monarch or toga-clad Roman senator upon the circumstance of being wrapped in a robe. My reason is that it's more comfortable to sling such a thing on over a shirt than to put on a collar and tie and button up in a coat and vest. Naturally, if I receive any company other than my aunts, I put on my collar, tie, vest, and coat—just as I shut up my folding bed and clean up any litter of loose papers that may be lying about."

Lovecraft almost invariably wrote in longhand. He scrawled revisions whenever possible on his original pages, but often there was no room for notes there; so he added them elsewhere. He was extremely reluctant to undertake the onerous task of typing the revised stories,

and continued to put it off as long as possible. He quite certainly disliked the typewriter and used it only because he found it necessary to do so. The overwhelming bulk of his letters were in longhand.

Whenever he finished a story, he immediately fell into a mood of depression about it. I quote a letter of February 25, 1935, which is typical of what he wrote to his correspondents: "As for *The Shadow Out of Time*—which I'm just finishing up now—I'm hanged if I know whether it's worth preserving or not. This is the *second* version I have completed, and I may tear it up as I did the first . . . although it is not quite as unsatisfying to me as that was. At any rate, I simply can't waste energy *typing* it until I decide whether it's worth preserving or not. If I send it as it is, the chances are that you can't make out more than half of it. . . . If I do decide to let you try your hand at making out the hieroglyphics, you mustn't feel under any obligation to go through the whole thing. Probably the waste basket is the real ultimate destination. Most readers will complain of the *length* of the thing—but I don't yet know how the given material can be presented more succinctly. The destroyed version was short—but it didn't convey what I wished to convey. The conditions and implications brought up by the central concept left all sorts of obvious questions unanswered, while the experience in Australia remained wholly unconvincing for lack of atmospheric preparation

and emotional modulation. Whether the present version is any better remains to be seen. It is possible that I ought to tear everything up and abandon the whole idea for a year—or until I have sufficiently forgotten this version to make an altogether fresh start. And then again, it is possible that I have wholly lost the knack of fictional formulation, and ought to cease altogether from attempting stories. I'll experiment a little more, though, before finally arriving at such a conclusion. No—this is the only thing since *The Thing on the Doorstep* which I have not destroyed. Nothing recent has really *come alive*—and I certainly don't want to put forth mechanical, routine bull of the sort which messes up the pages of *WT* and its still worse contemporaries.”

As to when Lovecraft wrote—I think it can be put that he wrote whenever he was free of the revision work and felt sufficiently in form to turn out a tale.

The Barlow Journal

(When H. P. Lovecraft paid a visit to his correspondent and distant cousin, R. H. Barlow, in 1934, the then teen-age host kept a rough series of notes concerning that visit. He had put them into a sort of order, and evidently intended to prepare them for a forthcoming Arkham House collection when death intervened. The time of the visit was from May 2 to June 21, 1934. Barlow's notes follow.)

* * *

Lovecraft always travelled by bus because of the cheapness of this mode of travel. When the bus arrived, he bounded out of it and promptly greeted me. We made

our way to a restaurant, and thence took a short walk about town, discussing various topics ranging from cheese to astrology. He spoke interminably in a pleasant but somewhat harsh voice, and proved to be a smooth-skinned man of face not unlike Dante's. His hair was short and thinningly grey. He clearly enjoyed the Florida warmth. We drove to the house and spent the afternoon in enthusiastic discussion.

* * *

H. P. L. told me of a dream in which he was one of a band of medieval soldiers (although he says that for him the Middle Ages are a perfect blank devoid of interest), crawling over housetops in search of a monster-thing concealed somewhere, one that was not only menacing the lives of the villagers, "but their very souls as well." The searchers were led by a man on a black horse who encouraged them actively and spurred them on. Finally locating the Thing where it was hidden behind a chimney, the men advanced, obtaining footholds in broken tiles and thatched roofs. It looked at them with hate, for they bore Egyptian staves and weapons—it was afraid of their weapons, but not of the men. When it was cornered, he saw for the first time that it had wings like those of a flying-squirrel. It flew or glided, and cast itself upon the man in the saddle on the black horse, and looked up sardonically, for it had merged its identity and

being with the rider, and had the muzzle of the Thing in the armour of the knight. Then it laughed cacklingly and rode away.

* * *

He compared age to a greased slide down which we went, unable to clutch for even a momentary hold to delay ourselves.

* * *

The whimsical appealed to him less than any other form of writing. He considered most games childish pastimes, and actively disliked to waste time at them.

* * *

Another dream. Lovecraft stood on a high cliff at the ocean's edge among blowing winds. A strange, cloaked man was there, with a number of large wooden balls; he claimed that he was a magician and could make the balls serve him. He was continually sending them off and once in a while they would return, rolling or flying through the air, encrusted with odd growths, slimy with wet, etc. There was no explanation of this dream, which terminated at this point.

* * *

When Howard Wandrei mentioned in a letter his forthcoming story, *The Hand of the O'Mecca*, Lovecraft observed, "O-Mecca? It sounds like an Irish Arab."

* * *

My quest for something to kill time was a source of perplexity to him, for he claimed that he never had to do anything to kill time, but was always rushed to get done what was necessary!

* * *

"Whitehead wasn't afraid of the devil," said Lovecraft, and told how Whitehead, seeing a snake crawling along the balustrade of his Dunedin home, took a pair of pliers, grabbed the thing about the head, while it coiled helplessly about his arm, and plunged it into alcohol. He later presented it to Lovecraft.

* * *

Lovecraft often spoke disapprovingly of some of the aspects of the personalities of his correspondents. He mentioned that one was so mercenary as to sell letters of famous men to him, and was particularly displeased because he had sold his grandfather's cane—which was the sort of item H. P. Lovecraft would have cherished. Another, he said, had many affectations, but, since he was young, H. P. L. was confident he would outgrow them. Yet another was a "Red" of such convictions that an attempt was made to deport him, and this would have succeeded had it not been for the intercession of W. Paul Cook, who pointed out that the health of the correspondent would not permit deportation—and, indeed, he died soon after.

* * *

Lovecraft spoke, too, of his revisions of such stories as *The Last Test*, *The Electric Executioner* (de Castro), *The Curse of Yig* (Bishop), *The Loved Dead* (Eddy), his ghost-writing of Houdini's work in *Weird Tales*, and mentioned that Long's "best" long work, *The Horror from the Hills*, includes, almost verbatim, certain dreams from Lovecraft's letters.

* * *

One night H. P. L. stayed up until past three o'clock writing.

* * *

Lovecraft pronounced Cthulhu as *Koot-u-lew*—representing sounds never meant for human vocal organs. R'lyeh was pronounced with rising emphasis on the latter letters. Nyarlathotep was based on a dream, as were also Azathoth and the *Fungi from Yuggoth*. I observed occasionally that H. P. L. said "ch" for "s".

* * *

Lovecraft's fondness for cats was everywhere manifest. "Bless Grandpa's old Bones!" he would say as an ejaculatory observation of appreciation at sight of one.

* * *

He often disparaged his work. "I'm afraid *The Hound* is a dead dog." . . . "*The White Ship* is sunk." . . .

The Outsider was a series of climaxes. Originally intended to end with the graveyard episode, it expanded because Lovecraft wondered what would happen if people should see the ghoul, and then finally decided to have the thing see itself. . . . *The Moon Bog* was virtually written to order, during a meeting of amateur journalists on St. Patrick's day. The story was to concern Ireland. . . . The theme of *In the Vault* was suggested by C. W. Smith, of Haverhill, Massachusetts, the 82-year old who issued some amateur papers. . . . He confessed to inventing Wilbur Whateley, but many other tales and characters stemmed from actual dreams.

* * *

H. P. L. believed that Houdini was "merely a clever showman. . . . There was one of the worst instances of misdirected intellect," he said of Houdini, who, he felt "was an accomplished man with talent and intelligence."

* * *

Lovecraft held that his life was "prosaic to dullness—reading, writing, and retiring." But one felt that he enjoyed it, and, apart from the pressure of ill health, he chose it voluntarily. He contended that he would not write if he could find what he desired already written. He held, too, that a plot in a weird story was in the nature of "excess baggage"—mood and atmosphere were all important.

* * *

Derleth's poetry he seemed to think fair enough, but he added, "Of course, one can't tell the value of this loosely-constructed verse."

* * *

Representing evil entities as composite monsters, he said one day, was a little childish. Yet he had to admit that they must be more fully described than mere formless shadows. "It must be handled very carefully."

* * *

Mrs. Gamwell told of how H. P. L., when young, for a while insisted "I'm a little girl."—and of how he would be set up on the table to spout Tennyson's *Maud*,—"Come into the garden, Maud, for the black bat Night has flown . . ." She recalled, too, that as a baby, he had visited Oliver Wendell Holmes, and as a boy visited Imogen Guiney, a friend of his mother's.

* * *

Whatever H. P. Lovecraft was, he was *not* a woodsman. He may have been at home in the familiar wooded country near Providence, but he was certainly not at home in wild country. One day he insisted on accompanying me and two others on a berry-picking expedition, though his relatively poor sight was certain to limit his ability. It was a day after a heavy rain, and much of the country along the stream where we picked was very muddy. Moreover, at one stretch we had to cross, a nar-

row board was the only means of expediting the party from one side of the stream to the other.

We picked for over an hour, Lovecraft blundering about in the bushes, striving valiantly to keep up with us, though, being an amateur at berry-picking, he had managed only half a basket by the time we had finished. So we helped him fill the basket, and started for home, H. P. L., by his own choice, bringing up the rear. When we came to the creek, I called out to him to point out where the board-bridge was; he replied that he saw it, so we went on our way.

When we reached home, he was no longer with us. He came in considerably later, soaked to the skin. He had not, after all, seen the plank on which he was to cross, but had plunged into the creek, neck deep, losing almost all his berries, and when he did come in, bedraggled and woebegone, he was still first and foremost the gentleman—he apologized to my mother for losing the berries!

* * *

"The tragedy of the artist," said Lovecraft, "is that he cannot keep his own work. An author can, through the printing press, but an artist either has his work or someone else has it."

* * *

The Picture in the House, said H. P. L., took its rise in some rustics Lovecraft had known—gnarled, rather primitive people.

Four Letters

Friday (Early December 1926)

My dear Mr. Derleth:

I was delighted to hear that you like *The Strange High House in the Mist*, for that is by all odds my own favourite among my recent yarns. The two elements in all existence which are most fascinating to me are *strangeness* and *antiquity*; and when I can combine the two in one tale I always feel that the result is better than as though I had only one of them. It remains to be seen how successful this bizarrerie can be when extended to novel length. I am now on Page 72 of my dreamland fantasy (*The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath*), and

am very fearful that Randolph Carter's adventures may have reached the point of palling on the reader; or that the very plethora of weird imagery may have destroyed the power of any one image to produce the desired impression of strangeness. This tale is one of picaresque adventure—a quest for the gods through varied and incredible scenes and perils—and is written continuously like *Vathek* without any subdivision into chapters, though it really contains several well-defined episodes. It will probably make about 100 pages—a small book—in all, and has very small likelihood of ever seeing the light of day in print. I dread the task of typing it so badly that I shall not attempt it till I have read it aloud to two or three good judges and obtained a verdict as to whether or not it is worth preserving. . . . *Polaris* was written in 1918, before I knew anything about Dunsany, and is interesting as a case of unconscious parallelism of manner. *Celephais* dates from after my introduction to Dunsany, and I will leave to the critic the question of just how much of the style is due to Dunsany's influence, and how much to my own independently similar cast of imagination. . . . With all good holiday wishes, I remain, Most cordially and sincerely yrs

—H. P. Lovecraft.

* * *

10 Barnes St.
Providence, R. I.
Feb'y. 20, 1927

My dear Mr. Derleth:

Joris-Karl Huysmans was a highly interesting character. He was a descendant of the old Dutch painter, Cornelis Huysmans, on his father's side, and French on his mother's side. Of all the extreme decadents, he was probably the greatest, and his *A Rebours* has been jocosely called "The Bible of the Nineties." As to Catholicism as a solution for the symbolist's or decadent's aesthetic-philosophic problems—you will find that an enormous number of the aesthetes of the nineties really did find in the rich colour and ancient ritual of the Roman Church a peace and sense of satisfaction they had not found elsewhere. It appears to me likely that the dominant element in their choice was a realisation of the ultimate futility of thought—i.e., of logical analysis and criteria of absolute truth. They envisaged life purely as a congeries of sensations pouring in upon them, and believed that the only value in any systematic interpretation or commentary concerning life was its power of satisfying the emotions and the aesthetic sense. In short, they submerged philosophic in aesthetic problems.

Now with this point-of-view it is easy to see why the Catholic Church, with its invitation to surrender responsibilities and accept as a guide a very ancient and beautiful

symbolization of all simple human feelings and aspirations, would be likely to appeal strongly to this intellectually disillusioned and beauty-loving type of artist. These men saw in the church a supremely poetic—even a dramatic—conception of man and his relation to infinity, and felt that its rich and ancient ceremonies formed the most perfect of all glorifications of the vital phases of man's emotional experience—the only branch of experience which they considered valid or significant. If you have found it otherwise, it may be either because your reaction to life is less wholly aesthetic than theirs—or because your type of aestheticism is different—or because the Catholic Church in America may lack some of the maturity of ritualistic development which it has in Europe. At any rate, there is no denying that thirty years ago aesthetes flocked to Catholicism in large numbers; the converts including Huysmans, Arthur Machen, Aubrey Beardsley, Francis Thompson, and dozens of others whose names I've heard mentioned but whom I can't recall.

It seems to me—an atheist of Protestant ancestry—that Catholicism is really an admirable faith for those artists whose taste is wholly gothic and mystical without any mixture of the classic or the intellectual. It is the inheritory of ancient and beautiful rhythms of thought, cadence, and gesture which thousands of years of human feeling have woven symbolically and expressively around

the various significant points of mortal experience; and as such it cannot help having a profound and genuine artistic importance and satisfyingness. It is the oldest continuously surviving poem of life that the races of Western Europe possess, and as such has an authority—which no other system of symbolic expression can acclaim.

It seems to me that if one is to have anything so extra-rational as religion of any sort, the Catholic and Episcopal systems are the only two sects with enough roots and anchors in the past to make them worthy of the affiliation of an artist. The life which they express is the natural, simple life of elder times, before the spread of industrialism and scientific discovery began its present transformation and destruction of society. No religion could express more, because all religion is a traditional art form dependent on a simple and continuous heritage. The future civilisation of mechanical invention, urban concentration, and scientific standardisation of life and thought is a monstrous and artificial thing which can never find embodiment either in art or in religion. Even now we find art and religion completely divorced from life and subsisting on retrospection and reminiscence as its vital material. There is no really *contemporary* art which expresses the scene and deeds and feelings of today as the art of other periods expressed the scene and deeds and feelings of those periods. We have entered a definite decadence, and must

live our imaginative lives in the past. Life as flowing today has not enough links of gradual development from the simpler life that moulded our race to inherit anything of true aesthetic potentiality. . . . Most cordially and sincerely yrs

—H. P. Lovecraft.

* * *

The old River Bank
Sept. 9, 1931

Dear A. W.:

No amount of contemporary teaching could break my addiction to the 18th century—my sense of natural placement therein. At home all the main bookcases in library, parlours, dining-room, and elsewhere were full of standard Victorian junk, most of the brown-leather old-timers (except rare items like the *Magnalia* or the ancestral Bibles and testaments) having been banished to a windowless third-story trunk-room which had sets of shelves. But what did I do? What, pray, but go with candles and kerosene lamp to that obscure and nighted aerial crypt—leaving the sunny downstairs 19th century flat, and boring my way back through the decades into the late 17th, 18th, and early 19th century by means of innumerable crumbling and long-s'd tomes of every size and nature—*Spectator*, *Tatler*, *Guardian*, *Idler*, *Rambler*, Dryden, Pope, Thomson, Young, Tichnall,

Cooke's *Hesiod*, Ovid by Various Hands, Francis's Horace and *Phaedrus*, &c . . . golden treasures, and thank God I have 'em yet as the *main* items of my own modest collection. Easy enough getting them when family dividing came—for nobody else wanted 'em! *Tempora cunquantus, sed ego in illis non amito!* And not alone literature, but dictionaries (including Johnson's—in an 1800 abridgment), encyclopedias, and rhetorical textbooks. *Cyclopaedia of Arts and Sciences*, compiled by a Society of Gentlemen (1763), Blair's *Rhetorick*, Abner Alden's 1797 *Reader*—old days, old days! It is out of this last-named relique that I carefully learnt the basic rules of versification at the age of 6—before anybody tried to teach me any modern way. Thus the old Georgian manner is *really* my first, instinctive natural medium of expression. Parker's *Aid to Composition* (ultra-modern for me—actually as recent as 1844!) was another hereditary thing that I learned backwards and forwards, from cover to cover, before I was 12 years old. It was a great life—and all joined up with my foot and bicycle rambles in quest of ancient houses and archaic streets and centuried villages. The 19th and 20th centuries receded as a dream—and the old colonial age became the reality. I habitually used the long *s* in writing—and my prose was just as Georgian as my verse. I used forms like *publick*, *accompt*, *intitule*, *shoar*, *con'd*, *ingulph*, &c. as a natural thing, and always elided the *e* of pasts and

participles (drown'd, walk'd, &c.) except when I meant them to receive the full original pronunciation with the extra syllable (drow-ed, walk-ed, &c.). . . . I think I once told you that I would actually feel more at home in a silverbutton'd coat, velvet small-cloaths, wig, steenkirk cravat, and all that goes with such an outfit from sword to snuff-box, then in the plain modern garb that good sense bids me wear in this prosaick aera. . . . Ah me! The past, the past! . . . Well, well, well, child—how the old man rambles! But that's what the ancient river bank always does to me.

Best wishes,

Grandpa H. P.

* * *

The Ancient Hill

Nov. 18, 1936

Dear A. W.:

. . . On Oct. 28 I penetrated a terrain which took me half a mile from any spot I had ever trod before in the course of a long life. I followed a road which branches north and west from the Plainfield Pike, ascending a low rise which skirted Nentaconhaunt's western foot and which commanded an utterly idyllic vista of rolling meadows, ancient stone walls, hoary groves, and distant cottage roofs to the west and south. Only two or three

miles from the city's heart—and yet in the primal rural New England of the first colonists! Just before sunset I ascended the hill by a precipitous cartpath bordering an ancient wood, and from the dizzy crest obtained an almost stupefying prospect of outspread countryside, gleaming rivulets, far-off forests, and mystical orange sky with the great solar disc sinking redly amidst bars of stratus clouds. Entering the woods, I saw the actual sunset through the trees, and then turned east to cross the hill to that more familiar cityward slope which I have always known. Never before had I realised the great extent of Nentaconhaunt's surface. It is really a miniature plateau or tableland, with valleys, ridges, and summits of its own, rather than a simple hill. From some of the hidden interior meadows—remote from every sign of nearby human life—I secured truly marvellous glimpses of the remote urban skyline—a dream of enchanted pinnacles and domes half-floating in air, and with an obscure aura of mystery around them. The upper windows of some of the taller towers held the fire of the sun after I had lost it, affording a spectacle of cryptic and curious glamour. Then I saw the great round disc of the Hunter's moon (2 days before full) floating above the belfries and minarets, while in the orange-glowing west Venus and Jupiter commenced to twinkle. My route across the plateau was varied—sometimes through the interior, but now and then getting

toward the wooded edge where dark valleys slope down to the plain below, and huge balanced boulders on rocky heights impart a spectral, druidic effect as they stand out against the twilight. I did not begin to cover the full extent of the plateau, and can see that I have a field for several future voyages of discovery. Finally I came to more familiar ground—where the grassy ridge of an old buried aqueduct gives the illusion of one of those vestigial Roman roads in Arthur Machen's Gwent country—and stood once more on the well-known eastward crest which I have gazed at since the age of three. The outspread city was rapidly lighting up, and lay like a constellation in the deepening dusk. The moon poured down increasing floods of pale gold, and the glow of Venus and Jupiter in the fading west grew intense. Then down the steep hillside to the car line and back to the prosaic haunts of man.

The other day I received, in the course of its circulation, your extremely fine sketch, *Goodbye, Margery*, which I read with keen interest and attention. I recalled its prototype in *Evening in Spring*, and believe that the present version represents a distinct advance. (The reference here is to an early manuscript draft of the novel titled *Evening in Spring*, of the final published version of which the story, *Goodbye, Margery*, became the last chapter.) The style has all of that haunting, dreamlike, reminiscent quality which one associates with your best

work, and the frequently recurrent image of the lonely streetlights and trees helps greatly to intensify the impression. There are, of course, some who might find a touch of preciosity in prose as close to poetry as this—but I would not concur in such a criticism. To my mind this dreamlike reminiscence forms a legitimate genre in itself—and one which you handle with peculiar aptitude. The tale is delicate—involving fragile and elusive emotional elements—but powerful and sincere; and it leaves a residue of very convincing feeling. . . .

Yr most obt grandsire,

Ech-Pi-El.

